CONVERSING W
BRUCE LEE ON

A REPORT OF A
ARTS BETWEEN
EXPERTS IN

Time: 22nd August, 1965. Afternoon.
Place: Siu Hon-san Health and Recreation College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Attendants: Bruce Lee, Sifu Siu Hon-san, Sifu Chang Chin-ting, three other young men and the writer of this article.

Far back in 1965, Bruce Lee had come back to Hong Kong once to attend a panel on martial arts. I was there too. For Bruce had stayed in US for a long time, his scope of knowledge was wide, therefore his point of view was different from that of the older generation. Bruce's former teacher Sifu Siu **Hon-san** (邵漢生) **and Chang Chin-ting** (張俊庭) also presented in that panel. Few people knew this panel. I had took down the minutes of this discussion in details at that time. Today, I publish them to interest our readers.

ITH MARTIAL ARTS

PANEL DISCUSSION ON MARTIAL BRUCE LEE AND OTHER KUNG FU HONG KONG.

In 1965 when Bruce came back to Hong Kong, I had a lucky chance to meet him. At that time, people in Hong Kong did not know that Bruce was extremely skilful in Kung Fu.

Owing to the fact that Bruce seldom demonstrated his Kung Fu publicly, so although his movies cast records continuously, many Bruce's fans still asked, "Is Bruce's Kung Fu real or not?"

"Absolutely real." I answered.

Certainly, these fans do not have any knowledge of Kung Fu, otherwise, they will not ask such a question.

I am propably the first one to see his surpassing Kung Fu. That happened in 1965 when I was invited to Sifu Siu Hon-san's place. He introduced Bruce to me. Hearing his theory of martial arts, I was already subdued. Later, he showed me some of his technique, I had to say that no one could match with him.

Here I must stress that I am not praising him, I am only writing out what I have heard and seen for your entertainment.

At that time, not only did the people in Hong Kong know nothing about his Kung Fu, but his coming back too. If you talked to them about Bruce Lee, they only knew that he was once a very popular child star. He had acted in the film "The Orphan" (人海孤鴻) which had achieved a very good response, but that was out of our discussion.

In Bruce's early years, certainly many had seen his Kung Fu; for he had followed Sifu Yip Man (葉問) to learn Wing ,Chun Kung Fu. He not only learnt Wing Chun Kung Fu, but also Jit-kune (節拳). He not only trained hard his technique but he also paid special attention to theory.

I have met a lot of good masters and students and feel that Chinese Kung Fu is having too much superstitious beliefs. Frankly speaking, still there are people who value these superstitious beliefs. Even though their students have high potentials, they still save their best techniques for themselves and seldom teach them the theory of boxing. This is very unfortunate. If Chinese Kung Fu continues to follow this way, how can it shine forth its glory?

I say this because I am moved by Bruce Lee. For he had won great prestige for Chinese Kung Fu and now the whole world knows the power of Chinese Kung Fu.

Although Bruce's Kung Fu is originated from Chinese Kung Fu, but I can say that his Kung Fu actually has risen above the general framework of Chinese Kung Fu. I remember once when he came back to film in Hong Kong, he was interviewed and said that in martial arts, there was no such thing as clans or handwork.

Bruce Lee studied philosophy in USA, thus his interpretation of martial arts and philosophy are inseparable.

Bruce's palms were soft.

At that time, Bruce was about 27. He wore a pale blue shirt, a pair of onix jean and a pair of black shoes. Unexpectedly, Bruce did not manicure his nails. This was strange. However, I did not ask him for the reason. But there was another thing that surprised me. When we shook hands, I found that his palm was very soft, there was not a sign of toughness and hardness.

I know many martial artists. Most of their palms are big and rough. When you shake hands with them, you will feel the toughness, and you can associate with hard Kung Fu. Some are more fearful, for example, Chen Hsing (陳星), a famous

fighting star, had very coarse hands, a glance will tell you that he is a Kung Fu expert. But Bruce's hands are different. Apparently, he did not stress too much on hard Kung Fu though he still had callus on his fists, yet they are not bad looking.

From Bruce's soft palms, I get an idea, that is, practical Kung Fu may not be good-looking, similarly, good-looking Kung Fu may not be practical.

Like many fans, I once was fascinated by things like iron-palm (鐵砂掌) and hand-blade (手刀) and had a wrong concept thinking that those who had a pair of iron-like palms would be great experts.

Later, I have a few friends who are great and famous fighters, yet they also have no callus on their fingers and fists. So, to measure your opponent's Kung Fu through their hands is absolutely unreliable. Unfortunately, plenty of youngsters still hold this view. Some of them even try hard to get callus on their hands by doing press-up. In fact, it is not necessary. Let's go back.

After paying regards, I asked for his opinions on the future of Chinese Kung Fu I already learnt that in his university, he defeated a Japanese karate expert and changed the attitude of US people towards Chinese Kung Fu.

He did not like flowery boxing forms.

At once, he poured out his heart. He admitted that he did not like flowery forms (拳套) and said that Kung Fu should be used in practical fighting, if it could not fight, it could not be regarded as Kung Fu.

"Have you studied the martial arts of foreign countries?" I asked.

"In comparison, we progress. To tell the truth, I personally think that Chinese martial arts is too conservative and too superstitious. If we want to promote it, we should cancel out the useless part." Bruce answered.

I continued to ask, "How can we cancel out the useless part?"

Bruce replied, "I think, as far as utility is concerned, many transitional and impractical patterns are not important. Why should we spend so many time to practice these

impractical patterns?"

"Do you mean to cancel out all the impractical and flowery patterns?"

"I believe so." Bruce expressed, "However, it differs from one to another."

Bruce thought that the past and the present were not the same. In the past, lives were more easy and leisure. It did not matter if you spent eight or ten years in Kung Fu training. However, in the present age, lives were tense. Who would have the patience? If we could not break through and stuck to the past, it would do nothing good to Kung Fu.

"Particularly Americans, and other westerners too, they talk about science and efficiency." Bruce said, "They do not believe anything that is non-scientific."

"Any example?"

"For instance —" Bruce smiled and continued, "Things like internal Kung Fu, light Kung Fu (輕功) in the Kung Fu novels. They are like myths. But many people really believe and fancy them. Things like these should not be preached."

He punched swiftly and powerfully.

For Bruce had stayed a good many years in US and yet never gave up the study of martial arts, so I asked him whether he had studied karate which was very popular in US.

Bruce said, "I do collect books and documentary films on karate."

"What is the difference between karate and Kung Fu?"

"It is comparatively simpler. For example, karate usually punches in this way — "

In the meantime, Bruce stood up and demonstrated a pattern. His body moved slightly. He punched like lightning with a "foo" sound. It was really swift and powerful.

Then he explained that this was a common pattern in Chinese Kung Fu, the "Arch-style forward punch" (弓步直衝拳). I had never seen anyone who could punch so fast and forceful. He continued to explain that in karate, one first prepared his fists besides his waist and then sent them out in co-operation with the power of the waist and the stance.

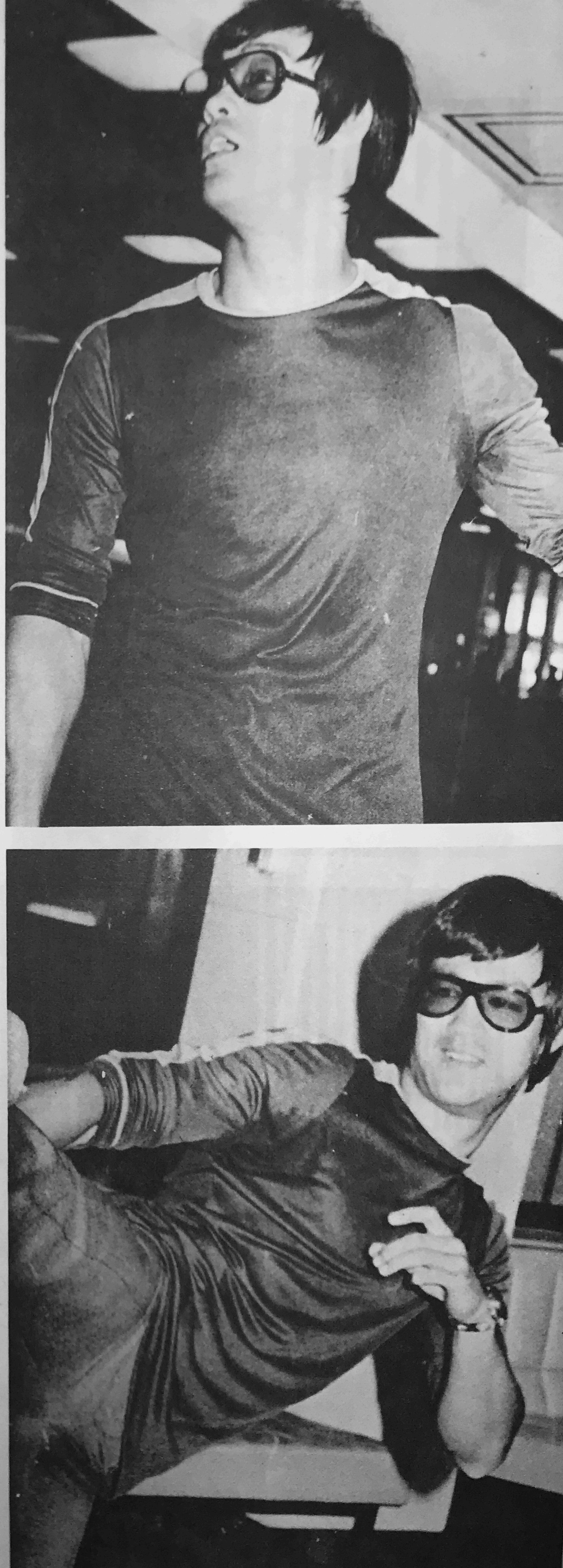
"What is your opinion on this kind of punch?"

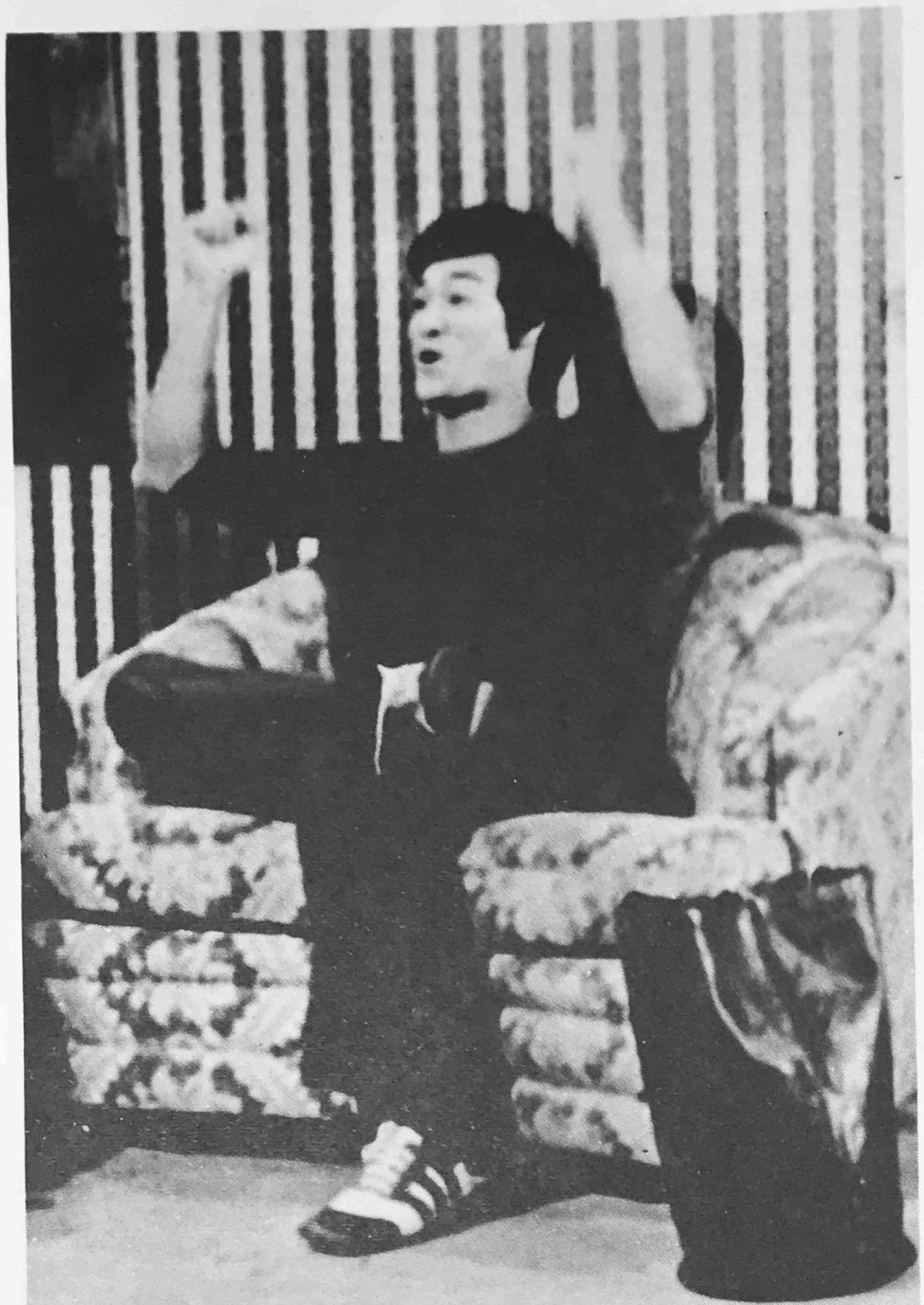
"Well!" Bruce Lee smiled, "It's arbitrary. If in actual combat, it is very bad if one's fists remain in one's waist."

"Then what should we do?"

"I personally think that we should train our fists to punch with full power at any position and in any time. There is a great distance between the boxing forms (拳套) we practise and actual combat, and I object to restrictions."

Bruce's impression on me is frank and true. He means what he says. He is never ambiguous. This impression is fresh and deep.





I know a great number of martial artists. But in the field of martial arts, frankly speaking, there can hardly be anyone like Bruce Lee who knows so thoroughly about it.

Bruce said, "Kung Fu should keep up with time."

In that meeting, Bruce told me that martial arts should keep up with time. He personally objected very much to non-scientific Kung Fu. He advocated that since it was martial arts, so it should be practical in fighting.

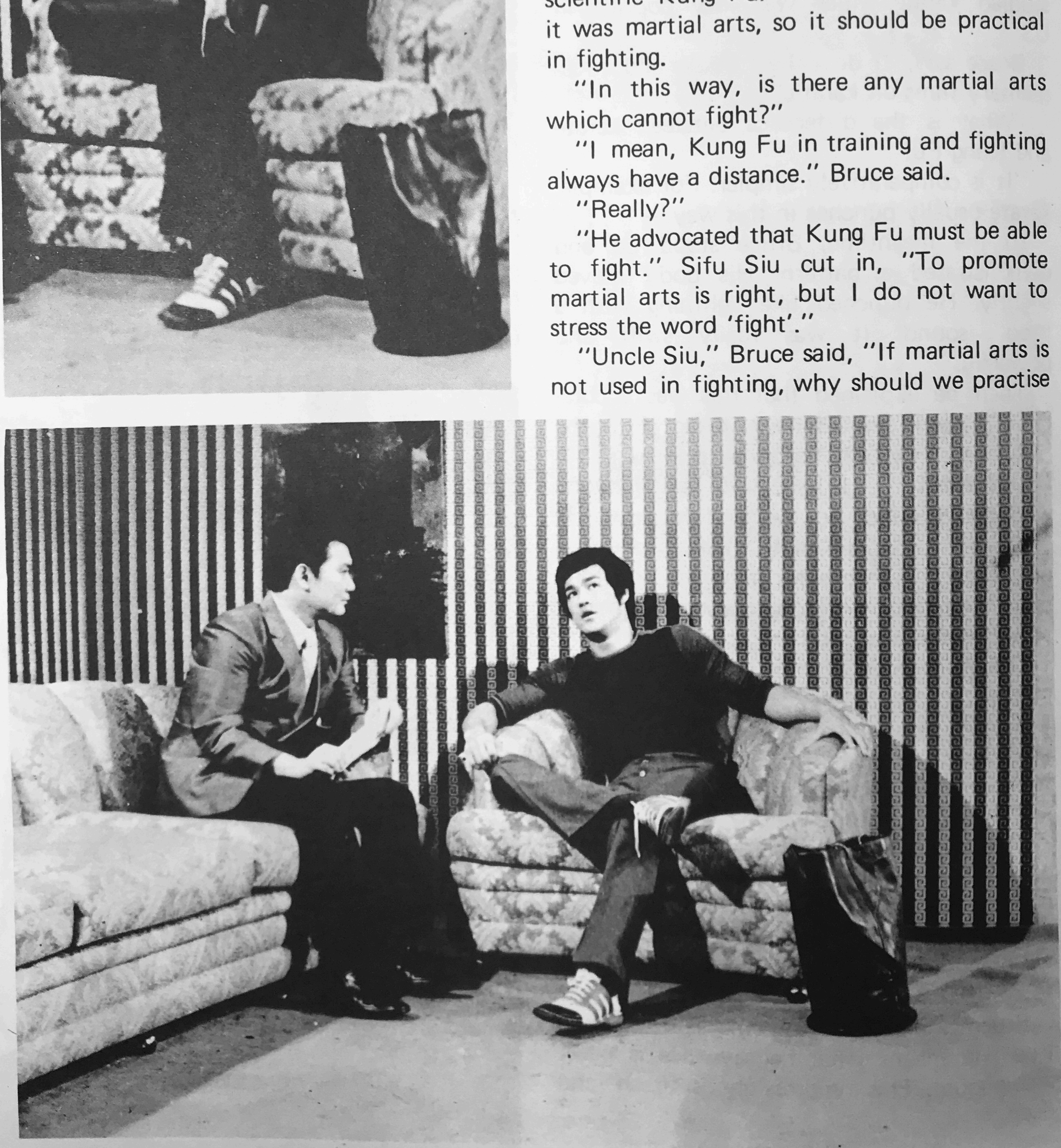
"In this way, is there any martial arts which cannot fight?"

"I mean, Kung Fu in training and fighting always have a distance." Bruce said.

"Really?"

"He advocated that Kung Fu must be able to fight." Sifu Siu cut in, "To promote martial arts is right, but I do not want to stress the word 'fight'."

"Uncle Siu," Bruce said, "If martial arts is not used in fighting, why should we practise



it? Can it be called as martial arts? If it cannot fight, why learn it? You stress that martial arts is good for health and re-creation, I do not object it. But if it can't fight, it can't be regarded as martial arts."

I agree with Bruce. The number of healthy exercises is so great that it cannot be counted. If one wants a healthy body, why bother to practise Kung Fu? To practise Kung Fu is to learn the skill of self-defence. If we do not talk of "Fight", what should we talk of?

Though I agreed with Bruce, yet I did not say a word, for I wanted to see the difference between Bruce's and Sifu Siu's opinion on martial arts.

I think, Bruce is a better martial artist and can be regarded as a martial artist for he has a deep cultivation in Kung Fu technique. But if he does not know physiology and physics and if he is narrow-minded, he cannot be named as a martial artist.

I think, a martial artist must have a scientific mind and can modernize martial arts. He must study it logically, bring out its glory and cut out the illogical part.

Like Bruce, he has a deep cultivation in this faculty. Apart from practising his words, I feel that his theory on martial arts worths the attention of the Kung Fu world. Bruce Lee stresses fastness, accuracy and power.

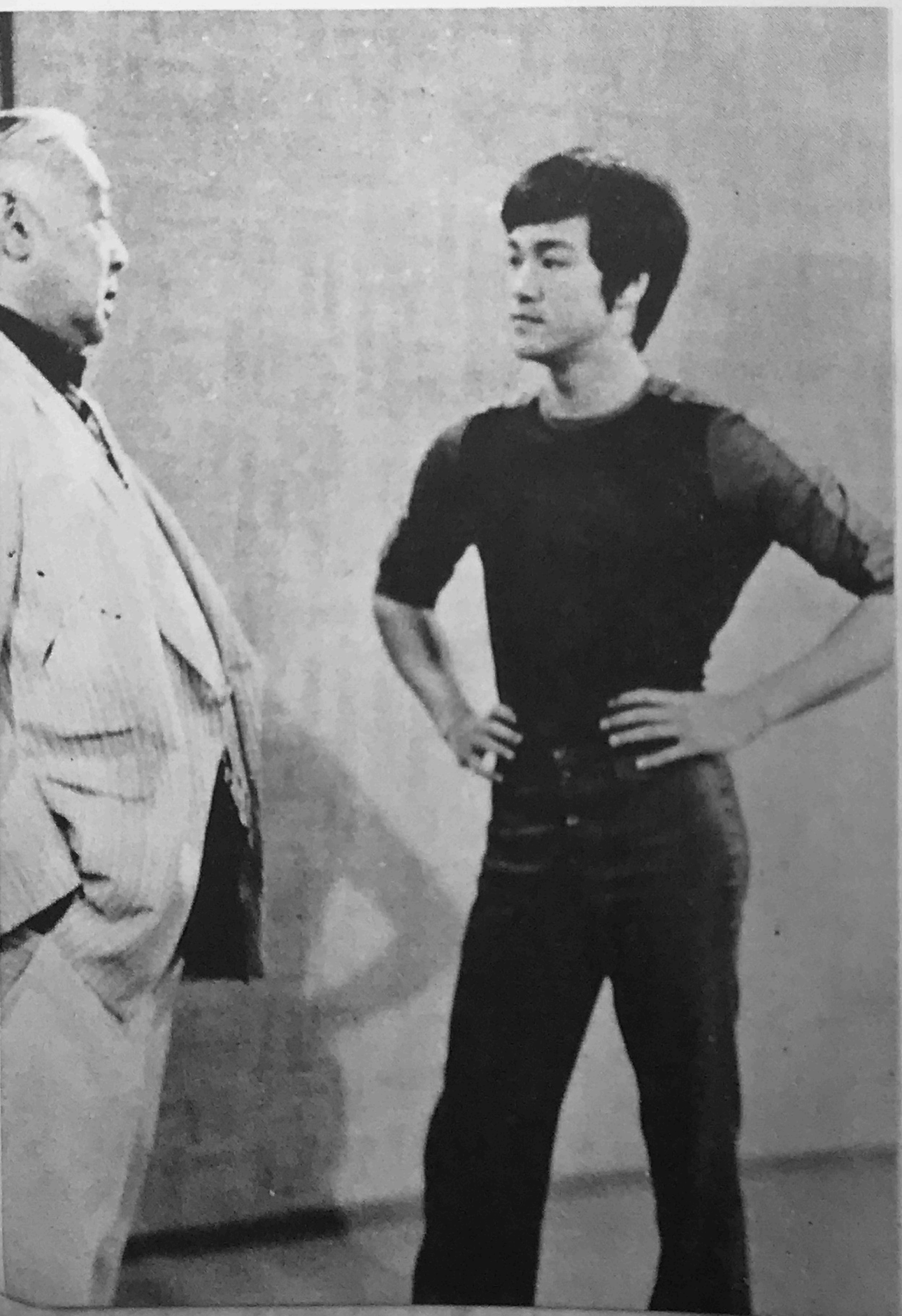
He tried to achieve fastness, accuracy and power by practical and realistic actions.

Certainly, Chinese Kung Fu always stresses fastness, accuracy and power, but how can we achieve these things? I deeply believe that every clan has its own way, and it is not invented by Bruce Lee, it has been found in the past already.

The aim of Bruce's "fastness, accuracy and power" is to get the result through the shortest way. He thinks that timely Kung Fu should be practical for nothing is stable, and Kung Fu is no exception. If we do not reform those that need reformation, it cannot be regarded as advance.

"Can you give some examples?" inquired.

"I think simply to practise boxing forms is not a good way." Bruce expressed. "More-



over, it wastes time and does not match the actual situation."

"What is the actual situation?"

"Some people are tall, some are short, some are stout, some are slim." Bruce went on, "There are various kinds of people. If all of them learn the same boxing form, then who does it fit?"

This is true. Bruce's saying is very reasonable. But in the past, even today, there are masters who teach students according to their potentials, nevertheless, it is not complete. Maybe Bruce said this out of his deep concern.

Bruce disclosed that from the view of self-defence, he did not like dance-like actions. Spending too much time on these actions was a waste and it did not fit in with modern lives.

"No matter it is a punch or a kick, it cannot be separated with waist and stance (腰馬)." Bruce spoke again, "If we want to train the power of the waist and stance through practising punches and kicks, that is not enough. Moreover, if the action of the waist and stance does not work in accordance with punches and kicks, then the attacking power of your punch and kick will be reduced."

The highest state in boxing is formless.

"Then according to your opinion, how can a kind of boxing be called as good?"

"I think, the highest state of boxing in application must have no absolute form. And, to tackle pattern A with pattern B may not be absolutely correct. I feel that martial arts should not be limited in a circle. That will produce in the students a wrong idea thinking that a certain pattern will achieve the same result in fighting as in practice."

"What is the meaning of 'From formed to formless and from finite to infinite'?"

Bruce believed when one learnt to fight, like how to punch and how to work in co-ordination with the waist and stance, there would be a certain form, this was the way of learning. In actual combat, it would change according to your opponent, thus it

could be used infinitely.

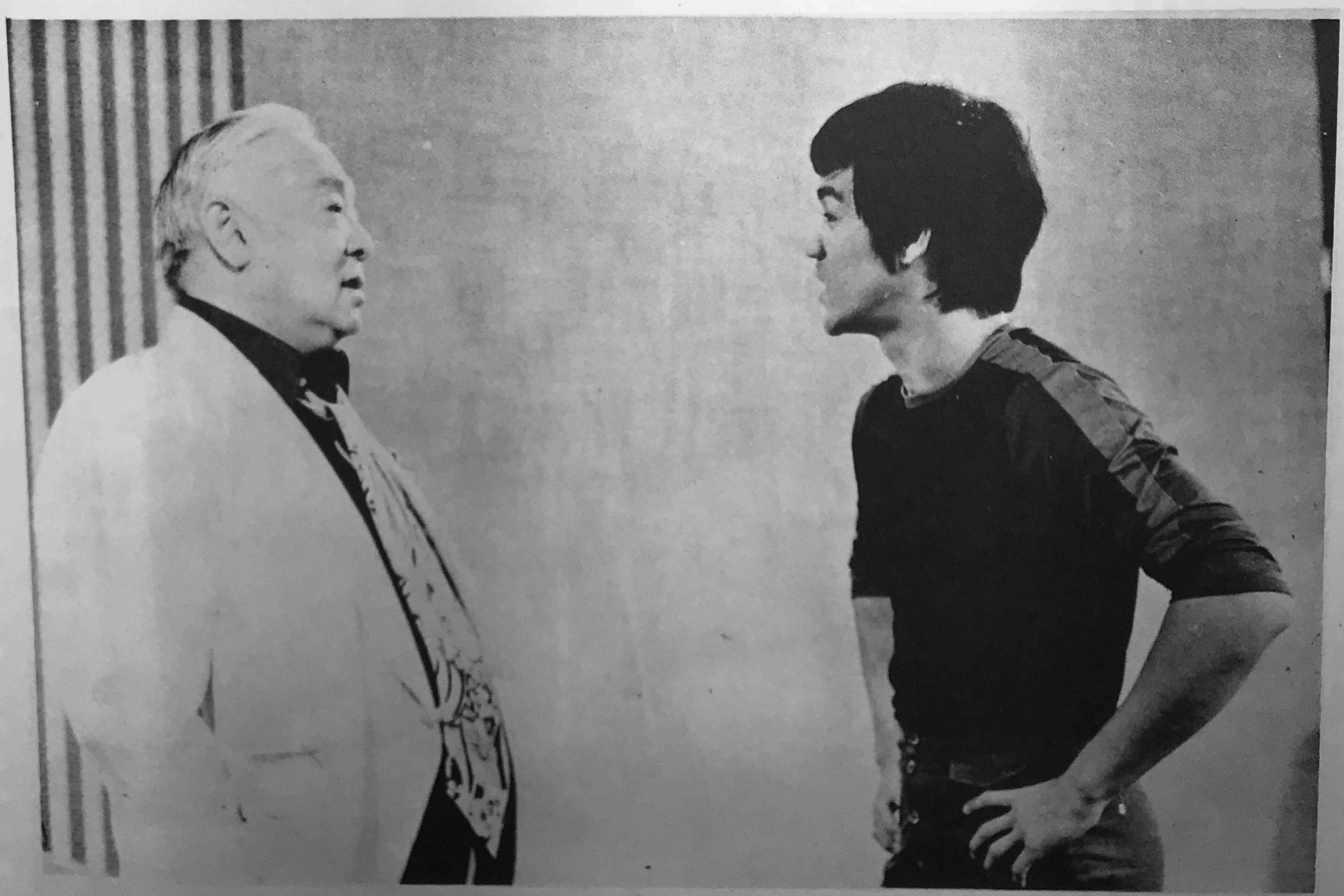
I admire this theory. This is somewhat similar to the past concept of "The unity of the body and sword", it has past into the state of extreme skill.

I am surprised for in "The Big Boss", "Fist of Fury" and "The Way of the Dragon", we can hardly see anything he learnt in his early years. My memory is bad. I can only remember the end of "The Big Boss" when Bruce killed Liu Yung (劉永), there are two or three patterns which seem to be the Wing Chun Kung Fu he had learnt in his early years, but I believe he had altered them before he used them. Besides this, we cannot notice other traces especially in "The Way of the Dragon". In the Colosseum scene, he fought a duel with Norris, I believe that is nearer to JKD, his punches, kicks, steps, all have been released from the former framework. Of course, this kind of real martial arts has won the praise of thousands of audience.

His kicks and punches carried strength and power.

Bruce's Kung Fu has reached the state of extreme skill. He is a strong and wise martial artist. Not only did he know thoroughly the principle of boxing, but he even practised them hard himself. Once there was a friend who admired Bruce desperately. He said that he would train hard Bruce's Kung Fu hoping that he could attain his skills. I smiled and said, "Impossible! Impossible!" My friend asked me why. "Even if you have the will, it is not enough if you do not have a brain like Bruce. Everyone can practise Kung Fu, but not all are martial artists. Bruce from his childhood loved martial arts, however he was not a man who would be contented with a little success. It is his brain and his serious study that bring him a glamourous success. I believe he would not be satisfied with all he had learnt before, otherwise, he would not bring forth the theory 'From formed to formless and from finite to infinite'." I answered him.

Bruce Lee again stressed that in practising Kung Fu, we should have a way in utilizing



the power of the whole body. If we could utilize to the fullest extent, then we had accomplished one of our aims.

"Any example?"

As I said this, Bruce stood up again and showed us some patterns of punch. One of them was an ordinary forward punch. He said that this kind of punch did not utilize properly all the power we had.

Then he showed another forward punch. That was completely different from the previous one. It worked in accordance with the waist and stance. Foo! It was powerful and carried with it force. I had never seen such a powerful punch. It was swift. I then thought that there might be some truth in the description of the Kung Fu novels.

Bruce then demonstrated a reverse kick. It was also fast as winds and it opened up my eyes. Bruce explained that the united action of the waist and stance was finished in a twinkle and in harmony with the punch or kick. In this case, we could release all the power we had through a point in a second.

A few years after I saw his demonstration, I read a featuring article on the power of Bruce's punch in "Blackbelt". Through the test of some scientific instruments, we knew that the power of JKD's punch was much greater than the power of karate's punch. From this, we can see that Bruce's theory of Kung Fu is supported by concrete evidences.

Later, when Bruce's movies shook the world, some friends of mine discussed over the validity of Bruce's Kung Fu. For I had seen Bruce's personal demonstration, so I held that they all were real. There might be times when he employed special effects to stand out the beauty of his actions.

Doubtlessly, a man who has real Kung Fu needs no puff. I am not over-praising Bruce. As a matter of fact, he is very famous already. I can firmly say that he will not like it too. I am only discussing his cultivation in martial arts because there are many who know not much about martial arts still doubt the realness of Bruce's Kung Fu. I am not judging his Kung Fu through

JKD is more frightful than karate.

his performance on the screen, but his own demonstration before me.

He could pierce through a pile of newspaper with his fist.

In that panel, when Bruce talked about the way of punching, he analysed the importance of the co-ordination of the waist and the stance in concentrating our strength. He then chose two young men there to hold up a pile of newspapers (about 2 or 3 inches thick) like what we saw when a karate expert kicked a piece of wood. He made a stance at will. Then, he stretched out his right hand until it was a few inches from the pile of newspapers. Everyone held their breath and watched silently. Immediately, Bruce twisted his waist, his fist "pierced" towards the pile of newspapers like lightning. These two young men could not stand it. Bruce explained that when we punched, we had to be able to punch with full power at any time, any place. This was very important. It was not necessary for us to hold our fists in our waist first and then punched. This was too stubborn and the

power could not be concentrated.

Sifu Siu Hon-san then told us that there was a name in Chinese Kung Fu for this kind of punch. It was called as "The power at an inch's distance" or "Inch-power" (寸勁) or "The power at a short distance" (短勁).

Bruce really had got the essence of this technique. This was also approved by the people there. I was totally subdued. I believed that Bruce was only making a demonstration and did not send forth his entire strength. Otherwise, it would be very unfortunate for the young men.

He was practical and never taught boxing forms.

A few years later, Bruce flew back to Hongkong. He was invited to a TV show and had shown some of his techniques. One of them was to break a piece of wood at an inch's distance. It is alike to what I had seen before. Although it is a demonstration, it already reveals the power of his punch. This kind of Kung Fu is really superb and is much higher than those ordinary performances. In those ordinary performances, the heroes usually hold their fists in their waists, then punch desperately and break the wood. It takes a much longer distance. Which is the better one? You can decide for yourself.

After Bruce showed us this technique in the panel, he told us about his teaching in U S. He said that he never taught boxing forms (Kata) to suit the lives in America.

Most Americans lived a tense life. It was impractical for them to spend a lot of time in learning some unimportant patterns. It wasted their time and money. Thus, when he taught his students, he charged according to the length of time. He also mentioned about his students there. They often wanted to know the achievements his teacher had. So, you just could not stand firm if you did not have solid contents.

The opinions of different Kung Fu experts differed.

I have talked too much on Bruce's theory of martial arts. Next I will talk about Sifu Siu's attitude to martial arts.

In that panel, the key characters were Bruce and Sifu Siu. Sifu Siu at that time made no objection to Bruce's words. Instead, he praised his Kung Fu, especially when he brought out the theory "From formed to formless" and "From finite to infinite".

Sifu Siu said, "To promote Chinese Kung Fu, indeed we have to cancel out those useless parts. But as to the traditional inheritance, we should have a new perspective."

"What is the new perspective?"

Siu Hon-san replied, "For example, many people in the past devoted their time to establish their own Kung Fu so that they could compare with other people. This kind of attitude is no longer suitable in this age." He continued, "On the other hand, some high monks did not like to pass on his Kung Fu. They separated themselves from the society. In this case, how can Chinese Kung Fu be promoted? This will do the society no good."

"Sifu Siu, you mean you will not fight?"

"Fighting is one of the aims of martial arts," Sifu Siu replied, "but I don't think it is the only aim. I still believe that today's martial arts should not concentrate on the word 'Fight'. It should centre on the happiness and the health of practisers."

"Sifu Siu," I asked, "Like what Bruce has said, martial arts and fighting are inseparable."

"Right! As I have just said, it is only one of the aims. My aim in promoting Chinese Kung Fu centres on three words, "Health, Recreation and Self-defence'. We should not

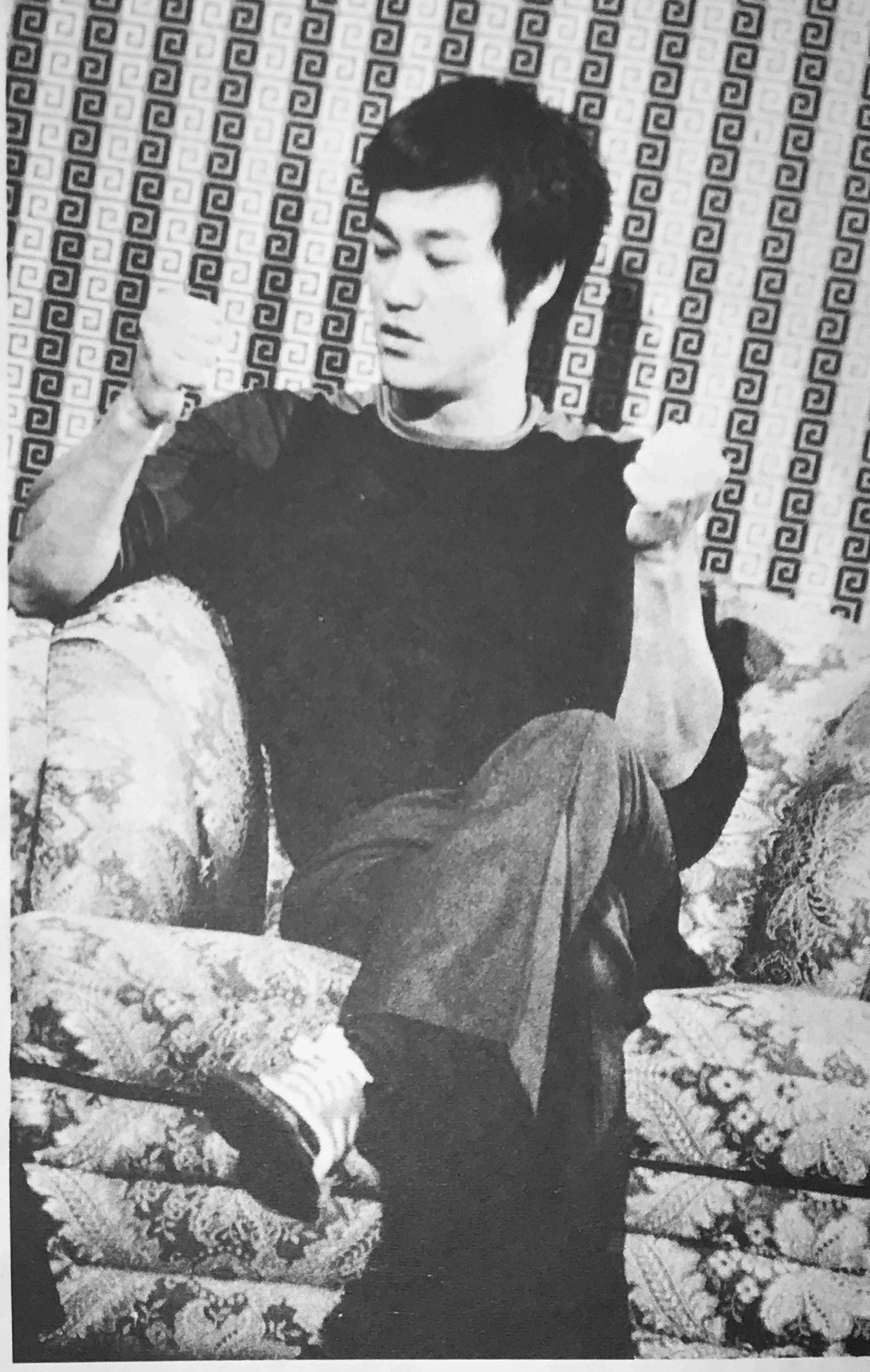
stress on fighting."

"Is martial arts without fighting?"

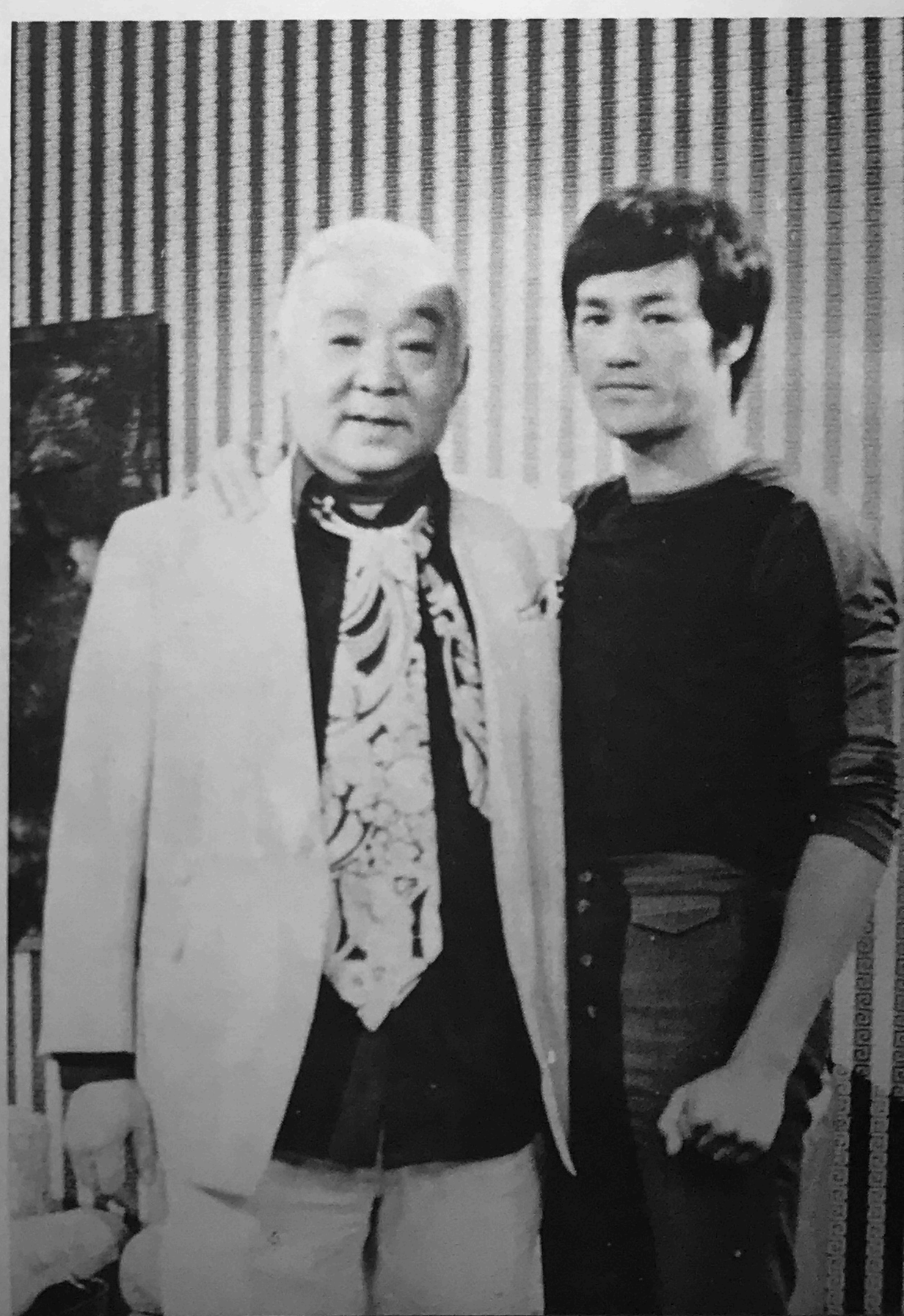
Siu said, "The scope of Chinese Kung Fu is very wide. It depends on from what angle you look at it."

Though Sifu Siu did not stress fighting, he did not deny its importance. I believed both of them were right.

But how can we preserve this kind of Chinese traditional technique? Sifu Siu thought that the combating technique and the unique patterns of all kind of Kung Fu should be preserved. He said, "To promote martial arts on the basis of body health and recreation will root out the wild nature in man. This is mass martial arts." He went on, "The most important thing we have to do in promoting Chinese Kung Fu is to popularize it so that everyone can be strong. It is good to individual and society. Then, how to knock down your opponent will become a secondary question. This is the difference between my attitude and Bruce's. Perhaps, it is the difference between the young and the old generation."



Bruce Lee — a rare martial artist.

Maybe it was because Bruce had a long stay in America, so in order to keep up with the lives there, he had to concentrate mainly on winning his opponents. For westerners would not listen to some empty words, they were practical and scientific. Thus, in order to promote Chinese Kung Fu, he had to throw away things that were unreasonable.

I have said that Bruce's Kung Fu has risen above the framework of Chinese Kung Fu. This is only my idea. But as a matter of fact, Bruce is very, very successful. A few US karate experts who have been taught by Bruce, all of them have won the champion in US Karate Contest. I know that Bruce had produced three karate champions. One of them is Norris, Bruce's opponent in "The Way of the Dragon". Another one is Joe Louis, a "Golden boy" in heavy-weight karate match. He is one of the top men in karate world. Both of them recommend highly Bruce's Kung Fu. From this, we know Bruce is really an outstanding martial artist.